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A Story of Christmas Eve

BY

C. N. AND A. M. WILLIAMSON



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ANGEL UNAWARES

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ANGEL UNAWARES

IF Angel Odell hadn't had a French nursery governess, and if that French governess hadn't suddenly recognized her lost lover in a wounded French sergeant on the sea-front, the Valois story would have been a Christmas tragedy instead of—what it turned out to be. This was strange, because neither the little American girl nor her governess nor her governess's lover had ever heard of the Valois family, nor had the Valois family heard of them. But most things that happen are strange, if seen from every point of view.

At first, when Mademoiselle Rose gave a little scream and rushed away from her charge to a good-looking soldier with his arm in a sling, Angel stood still, extremely interested. Her mother did not know about the lost lover. One need not tell all one's heart secrets to one's employer on being engaged at a Paris agency! But Mademoiselle cried in the night sometimes and gazed at a photograph, so Angel (whose bed was in the same room) had asked questions safer to answer than leave unanswered. When she saw the meeting she quickly put two and two together in her intelligent, seven-year-old brain.

"That's Claude," said the child to herself. "So he's alive, after all. My goodness me! what a nice Christmas present for Mademoiselle! I'm glad it's after lunch instead of before, though, for I was hungry, and I expect she'll want to talk to him a long time. I suppose she'll introduce him to me and we'll all three walk up and down."

Instead of walking, however, Mademoiselle and her Christmas present sat down on one of the seats placed at regular intervals along the Mentone sea front. Apparently Mademoiselle forgot Angel's existence, and "Claude" had not observed it. The child stood neglected until she was tired and very bored. Then, too polite to interrupt (a succession of nursery governesses of several nations had instructed her never to interrupt), she decided to go home.

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"Home" was a hotel; and Mrs. Odell, Angel, and Mademoiselle had arrived only the day before from Paris, Mademoiselle had been in Mentone before (that was one reason for engaging her), but Angel and her mother never had. Angel's father was one of several brilliant young men in the American Embassy, where he was well content for himself, but found the idea of bombs on heads he loved bad for his nerves; accordingly, wife and child had been sent to safety in the south of France, somewhat against the former's will. At the moment, Elinor Odell was getting off letters, meaning to go out later and buy Christmas toys. So it happened that, just as Angel was wondering which turn to take, Angel's mother was writing: "Mademoiselle is young and pretty, but as trustworthy as if she were a *hundred*. She never loses sight of the Angel-Imp for an instant."

The Angel-Imp in question wished that streets going inland from the Promenade du Midi didn't look so much alike. They ~~all~~ seemed to have rivers or gardens running up the middle, and pointed blue mountains at the back, except the ones farther along, where the shops were. Angel remembered a bridge. She thought the right turn was near. Yes, that must be the street! You walked along that for a while, and then you had to turn again. You passed villas with gardens.

By and by Angel forgot to look for landmarks; there were so many things which amused her: children riding on donkeys led by brown old women in funny hats like toadstools; a flock of very white sheep with long, silky hair, being driven by a fur-coated boy into an olive wood; bands of soldiers black as jet, wearing queer red caps on their woolly heads. It was all so interesting and exciting that when Angel remembered herself she was not quite sure she knew where she was.

This would have been rather frightening if the realization hadn't come just outside the half-open gates of a garden lovely as fairy-land. It had been winter in Paris. Here it was summer; yet to-morrow was going to be Christmas. Angel could not understand. The thing was like a dream, and held her fascinated. She was an imaginative child, and it thrilled her to say to herself, "Maybe this garden is fairyland!" Although, of course, the common-sense side of her answered, "Pooh! You know very well, you silly, there's no such place."

Anyhow, the garden *looked* like fairyland. It was exactly what fairyland ought to be; and even mother (who was a grown-up, though father often called her "child") said that no really nice person would swear there weren't any fairies in the world.

Hundreds and maybe thousands of orange and lemon trees made a sparkling green roof for a carpet of purplish-blue violets, white carnations, and roses of every shade from palest coral pink to deepest crimson. The flowers grew in the midst of young grass which the sun, shining through tree-branches, lit with the vivid green of emeralds. It shone also on the countless globes of the oranges and lemons, making them glow like lighted lamps of pale topaz and transparent red-gold among the dark-green leaves.

"Fairy Christmas trees!" thought Angel Odell. And it seemed to her that the invisible hand of an equally invisible fairy clutched her dress and began to pull her through the open gateway. After all, why should the gates be open if people were not expected to walk into the garden?

"I don't care. I *will* go in, whether it's fairyland or not," Angel decided.

Nothing else seemed important except the garden and what might happen to her there when she had once got past the gates. Not Mademoiselle Rose, not her Claude, not going home to the hotel, and not even seeing mother.

Angel let the unseen hand guide her through the gates, and on the other side the mysterious beauty of the garden was more thrilling than ever, because it was all around her and under her feet and over her head. The road looked as if no wagons ever went over it, though it was wide enough for them to pass. It was golden-brown in patches, but was overgrown with a film of green, almost like lace. The orange-trees were planted so that they made long, straight aisles shut in at the far end with a misty curtain of blue. Down each aisle a narrow, gold-brown path ran between the flowers; and, fascinated, the child from

another land began slowly to follow one of the ways. A vague fancy stole through her mind that the silence and heavy perfume of lemon blossoms were, somehow, parts of each other. It was as if she were about to find out a wonderful secret; and, looking up through the green net to a sky of blue, shot with rose, she wandered on with a sense of waiting.

Not only did little paths run the length of those long, straight aisles, but crossed from one aisle into another, until Angel lost count, as from violets she visited roses, and from roses passed to carnations and stocks. Beyond the arbor of orange- and lemon-trees showered a golden rain of mimosas, and close by clustered a grove of palms, with tall-trunked, date-laden giants rearing their crests in the middle of the group, and in an outer ring, low-plumed dwarfs whose feathered branches drooped to earth.

Angel Odell associated palms with large pots in halls and conservatories. She had not known until to-day that they could grow out of doors. Staring at the grove in wonder, she caught sight of something red which showed between the trailing fronds of a palm like a green-domed tent. And mixed in with the something red was something white that moved. Almost before she knew what she was doing, Angel had stooped down and crept beneath the drapery of rustling plumes.

The "red thing" was an old knitted shawl, spread over a wooden seat of the right height for a child; and the "white thing" was a half-Persian kitten. It was sitting on the shawl, too earnestly ironing its silver ruff with a pink tongue to feel the slightest concern in the intrusion of a stranger.

"Oh, you lovely catkin!" exclaimed Angel. Cautiously she subsided on to the end of the wooden seat, and, slipping off her gray mittens, began to smooth the fluffy back. On her thumb glittered a large diamond in a ring of her mother's she had picked up on the dressing-table and forgotten to take off. Seeing that the object of her attentions did not openly object to them, and, indeed, appeared hypnotized by the flashing stone, she transferred the white ball of fur from the red shawl to her gray-corduroy lap. It was velvet corduroy, and even more delightful to sit on than knitted wool. The kitten submitted in a dignified, aloof manner to the child's caresses, and Angel sat rigidly still, hardly daring to breathe lest the haughty creature should take offense.

It was just then that a woman suddenly appeared from, it seemed, nowhere in particular. Angel's heart gave a jump. What if the woman—just a mere woman, not a fairy at all—owned the garden, and should scold the little stranger girl for coming in, sitting down, and playing with her kitten?

"Maybe if I don't move or make any noise she'll go away and won't see me," the child thought.

To her no grown-up person could be really young, but for a grown-up this woman looked youngish, about as young as mother. Mother had been twenty-eight on her last birthday, and looked almost like a little girl before she was dressed in the morning, with clouds of dark hair falling around her small, white face and shading her big, blue eyes.

This woman had dark hair, too, but Angel could not see what color her eyes were. She was looking down. Her eyelashes were long and black, like mother's, yet she was not like mother in any other way. Mother's face was rather round, and nearly always smiling and happy. This woman's face, though pretty—yes, Angel thought it pretty, and, like a picture of the Madonna Mademoiselle had—was very grave and sad. That was strange, in this beautiful garden full of flowers and sunshine; like a wrong note in music, if Angel mischievously struck a key while mother was playing something gay and sweet. Besides, the woman had on a dress that wasn't pretty at all, or like the dresses mother wore. It was brown, and plain, without any trimming, almost like a servant's dress. Angel wished she would go away, but she didn't; she stooped down and began to do two very queer things. Both were queer for a woman to do, and one was dreadful.

The first thing—the thing that was only queer—was to cover up a bed of very delicate flowers, whose name Angel had never heard, with gray stuff such as kitchen towels are made of, only much thicker and rougher. The woman had been carrying a large bundle of this in her arms, and in covering the bed she supported the gray stuff on sticks higher than the flowers.

The other queer thing she did, which was dreadful as well as queer, was to cry. It seemed awful to Angel that a grown-up woman should cry—cry in a beautiful garden, where she thought she was alone. And on Christmas Eve! Angel felt quite sick. Her throat filled as if she, too, were going to cry. It was all she could do not to give the kitten a nervous squeeze. She was seized with a wild wish to rush out and try to comfort the woman; but instinct even more than childish shyness held her back. Angel knew that, if she had stolen away to cry where she hoped not to be seen, she would hate to have a strange person jump out and surprise her. Probably she would hate it even more if she were a grown-up.

The child hidden under the palm-tree and the woman outside were so near to each other that the child could hear the woman give choking sobs which it seemed as if she tried to swallow. Perhaps she didn't try hard enough at first, for the sobs, instead of stopping, came faster and harder, and Angel's large, horrified eyes saw tears run down the woman's face and splash on to the flowers. Suddenly, however, the gasping ceased. The woman let fall an end of the bagging not yet draped over the sticks, and sprang to her feet with the quick grace of a frightened fawn. Not that Angel definitely thought of any such simile, but away in the back of her mind dimly materialized the picture of a deer she had once seen rise up among the tall grasses in a public park.

The young woman fumbled in the pocket of her shabby brown dress and found a handkerchief. She hurriedly dabbed her eyes, and rubbed her cheeks hard, as if to make them so red that the redness of her eyelids might not be noticed.

"She must have heard some noise," thought Angel; and as the thought formed she, too, heard what the woman had heard—the pat-pat of footsteps coming lightly and quickly across grass. Then from under the green-and-gold mimosas a man appeared—a tall, youngish man, very thin and pale, carrying a thing which seemed a mysterious object for a man to carry in his arms; but then, everything about this fairy garden was mysterious and puzzling.

Heavily leaning against the man's shoulder and hanging down over his back was a pine-tree, small for a pine-tree, but large for a person to carry. He came on with his head bent, and at first did not see the woman, so—apparently—he was not in search of her. But he limped as he walked, and the woman cried out sharply:

"Oh, Paul, you've hurt yourself! You've had a fall!"

He looked up, surprised. "Why, dear one, I didn't know you were here," he said. "I did slip on a stone coming down the mountain. But it's nothing. I've wrenched my ankle a little, that's all."

"And you had that long, hard walk afterward!" the woman exclaimed. "My poor Paul! You out of bed only three days ago. It's too cruel. Everything goes against us."

"Everything?" He caught her up and a look of alarm or anxiety chased away the smile he had put on to reassure her. "Has bad news come, then? But yes—you needn't answer. I know it has. I wish I hadn't said you might open the avocat's letter! You've been crying, Suze."

The woman spoke English as if it were her own language, but the man had an accent which showed that he was not born to it. Even Angel—listening half against her will—noticed that, almost unconsciously. But she had been forced to think a great deal about "accent" in the last few months since she had come to live in Paris and talk with a French governess. She had picked up French quickly, as children do, but was always having the word "accent, accent!" drummed into her head.

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"I couldn't help crying a little," said Suze. "I didn't mean to let you know. I thought you'd be longer away."

"You mustn't try to hide your feelings from me, dear," the man said. "Troubles will be lighter if you let me bear them with you."

"But you—you're always trying to cheer me up, no matter what's happened," the woman reminded him, almost reproachfully. Angel realized that they must be husband and wife. They were about the right age for each other, she thought; and even a child could see by the look in their eyes that they loved one another dearly. "You pretend now that you're not hurt, but you are; you're suffering—your face shows it. Ah! the dear face, so white, so patient! I hoped I should have good news for you when you came back. I hoped that in spite of everything we might have a little peace, a little happiness, just enough to last us over Christmas, if no more. But what's the use of our hoping? Always comes another blow!" Her sobs broke out again. Tears poured over her cheeks.

The man stooped and laid the little pine-tree on the grass, letting it down carefully, not to break the branches. Then he took his wife in his arms and pressed her head against his shoulder. They looked two pathetic figures in their plain, rather shabby clothes, clinging together in the garden where everything save themselves was singing with joy of life and beauty.

"You mustn't give way like this, Suze," said the man, gently. "Think of the children."

"I know," she sobbed, "I hate myself for breaking down. I ought to think of *you* as well as the children, though you'd never tell me to do that. You never think of yourself, except of what you can do for me and them. This Christmas tree you've brought! Even if you'd been well, it would have been a big adventure, toiling up into the mountains, tired after a day's work in the garden; looking for the right tree, sure to grow in the worst place to get at; cutting it down with an ax that's no more than a toy, and then bringing the thing home on your back! Why, it would be hard labor for a strong man—"

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"Love gives strength," he soothed her, stroking her ruffled dark hair; and Angel thought that she had never seen a man's hand so thin. "I've done myself no harm, truly, dear one. I may not be very strong yet, but I'm getting on. Last week you said you were thankful, whatever happened, to have me out of bed—"

"You oughtn't to have been out!" Suze broke in, rebelliously. "If we weren't so poor—"

"Never mind. It did me no real harm. I've had no relapse. And we've got each other and the children. There are rich people who'd change with us. Let's forget the bad news and the other troubles till after Christmas—"

"How can we forget being hungry?"

"By eating an orange!" The man tried to laugh. "We've got plenty of those."

"Just now we have. But if we're turned out?"

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"We must do as Adam and Eve did when they were turned out of Eden. They found work, I suppose. So shall we. Though God knows it almost kills me to think of what I've brought on you and the babies."

"Don't say '*you*!' You've never brought anything but happiness to us or anybody."

"I'm afraid—I've thought, sometimes—I had no right to marry you."

"Why, life wouldn't have been life for me without you, Paul!"

"Or for me without you, Suze."

"And all we've gone through has only drawn us closer together. But this last blow is different. It's too cruel! . . . That Judas of a man, Siegel, making us believe he was our good friend and he doing you a great kindness selling you this garden and the business so cheap! Think, Paul, how he described it, only last August, just after I found you in Antwerp when you were getting well after your wound. Would one *believe* a man could make up his mind to ruin another who'd nearly given his life for his country? Plan and plan to rob him of his savings, pretending all the time to open the gates of Paradise—"

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"Well, in one way this *is* Paradise," said Paul, lifting his eyes to the sky which showered sunset roses through silver branches of olives, gold branches of mimosas.

"Paradise with the serpent of deceit in it!" cried Suze. "The Nice lawyer says in his letter—I'm not sorry you let me open it—that Siegel drew up the deeds so cleverly it's almost impossible to convict him of swindling. Monsieur Vignal thinks no business man would lend money on the chance of what you might get back from your deposit with Siegel if you sued him for false pretenses. And yet, in the next sentence, Vignal advises you to stand up against Siegel trying to turn you out because you can't and won't and oughtn't to pay the rest. He says, 'hold on to the place if you possibly can, and make Siegel attack you in the courts, so you can have a chance of bringing out the real facts and perhaps proving that you're an injured man.' He thinks if you could stop here instead of submitting to be turned out, the courts would very likely decide that you'd paid Siegel already as much as the business is worth, and the place would be accounted ours. Isn't that a mockery, when Monsieur Vignal knows as well as we do we haven't a penny to live on—that the Riviera's empty these war days, that nobody buys our plants, and you can't fill orders from over the Swiss or Italian frontiers, even if you could get *half* as many as Siegel's lying books showed?"

"Vignal means well," said the man. "It's good of him to advise me without asking for pay."

"No more than a Frenchman ought to do for a Belgian!" the woman retorted. "The refugees who ask for charity get all the sympathy. We, who ask only for work—"

"We have received kindness, too. Don't let's doubt God's goodness on the eve of Christmas—the day when He gave His only Son for us all, my Suze! . . . 'Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.' Well, there's *no* evil in this day—or to-morrow. There sha'n't be. Let's trust; let's not stop hoping, for not to hope is death. You go to the children, dearest, now, and I'll slip around the back way with this tree, so they sha'n't see it till it's lighted and decorated to-night—"

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"Lighted and decorated!" Suze echoed, with a laugh that came trembling out of tears.

"Yes," insisted Paul, "trust me. Your husband isn't an artist for nothing! Come along. No more time for repining if the tree's to be ready before the children's bedtime. I tell you, it will be a great work!"

"You're the most wonderful man in the world!" breathed Suze senior. "And we *adore* you—our soldier who fights for us always. Oh, but listen! There's Paulette calling me. I told the two I'd be back before they finished their Christmas present for father. Guess what it is—but no, it wouldn't be fair to the poor little things. They're coming to look for me. If you go by the mimosa path you can get away before they see you."

Without a word, the man picked up the miniature pine-tree and, shouldering it, limped off almost at a run. At the same instant the woman went down on her knees and began once more to drape the gray bagging over the flower-bed, as if nothing had happened to interrupt her task.

"Here I am, by the palm-grove. Come and help me cover the flowers!" she cried, almost cheerily, in answer to a child shouting "Maman! Maman!"

At the silver sound of the little voice, the kitten in Angel Odel's lap stiffened itself for a spring. Mechanically her hands tightened on the ball of fluff, but it wriggled free, and, with a jump, landed clear of the palm, on the grass beyond. Small as it was, the little animal left the fronds rustling in its wake, and the woman on her knees, looking up with a start, caught a glimpse of something gray under the tree. Two pinafored children, emerging from a side-path, caught the same glimpse, and as the younger snatched up the kitten the elder took a step forward and parted the long green plumes of the agitated palm.

"Why, mother!" she exclaimed in French, "there's a strange child under our tree, sitting seat! Oh, but a beautiful child in on our splendid clothes. Can she be real, or—oh, mother! Is she the Christmas fairy father says God sends to bless those who love one another?"

Without answering, the woman got up from her knees.Flushed with embarrassment, she peeped over her daughter's golden head. The younger girl peeped, also, hanging shyly to her mother's dress. It was a horrid moment for Angel Odel.

The children were smaller than she—not more than six and four years old at most—and they were, Angel saw at a glance, pretty as life-size dolls, with their yellow curls, rose-red cheeks, and pink pinafores. Their great blue eyes stared at her, not with anger, but bewildered admiration. Even their mother did not look as if she meant to scold or sweep the intruder angrily out of her hiding-place. But, child as she was, Angel realized that she had been doing a forbidden thing, a shameful thing. She had been eavesdropping. She had seen the woman crying; she had heard her talking over family secrets with her husband; she had come to know what she had no right to know, and what those two had meant for each other's hearts alone. Ever since she was old enough to learn anything, she had been taught that "eavesdropping" was one of those disgusting sins no honorable girl or boy could possibly commit. Her father himself had said those very words; unforgettable words, because father was Angel's hero. What would he think if he could see her now? Somehow, she *must* atone!

"I—I didn't *mean* to hide," she stammered. "I looked in—the gate was open. I thought—maybe it was a fairy garden—"

"Oh, mother, you see she *is* a fairy," gasped Suze junior, the elder of the children.

"Perhaps," agreed Suze senior, doubtfully. And her eyes challenged the stranger. "Who are you, really? Where do you come from?"

"I—I often play I'm a fairy." The culprit seized the straw held out to her. "I—expect I am one. I know the *me* in the looking-glass is, and sometimes I can't tell which is which Mademoiselle plays *she* can't, either. She says when I come in, 'Which is this, today, the angel or the fairy?' My name's Angela."

"Oh mother!" breathed both children together, their eyes round with awe. "An angel and a fairy."

"And I'm lost," the wonderful visitor hurried on, heading off an answer from mother. "I don't know where I live."

"She doesn't know where she lives," murmured Suze and Paulette, in chorus. "Then she can stay always and live with us, can't she?"

"Perhaps she wouldn't want to do that," said Suze senior. "Perhaps *she* has a mother waiting for her somewhere."

"But do fairies have mothers?" Paulette wanted to know.

"Or angels?" added Suze. "I always thought they hadn't."

"I have," the visitor announced, hastily. "Some kinds of angels do—the kind like me. My name's Angel Odell."

"Well, I never supposed angels had last names," Paulette reflected, aloud. "I thought they were just called Gabriel or something like that, and that they were generally boys."

"Oh no!" Angel Odell announced, with decision. "Boys are never angels, anyhow, not in America where I live when I'm home."

"She lives in America," the two children repeated to their mother. "That's not fairyland or heaven, is it?"

"Fairyland can be anywhere, your father says," Suze senior answered. "But see, it's going to be twilight soon! I think we must try to find out where Angel Odell lives, and take her home. She says she's lost—so her mother will be anxious."

"She thinks I'm with my governess," said Angel.

"Oh, fairy angels have governesses," the elder sister mourned, another illusion gone. "That's as bad as being a real child and going to school." The two spoke English or French indiscriminately, seeming hardly to know which language they used, but luckily Angel understood French very well, thanks to Paris and Mademoiselle Rose.

"I like my governess," she explained. "She's very pretty and she's engaged to a soldier. That's why I'm lost. Because she met him by the sea, instead of his being dead as she thought, so she forgot to watch me. I was going home alone when I saw your garden gate open, and it looked just like fairyland. If you please, I wish you would find where I live. It's a—hotel, and it has a garden, too, but not like this."

Suze senior set her wits to work. She knew that, in those days of war, not many hotels were open in Mentone. She questioned Angel, and, learning that the hotel garden was high above the sea, with glass screens to keep off the wind and a view where you saw the town all piled together on the side of a hill with dark, tall trees on top, she guessed the Bellevue.

"We'll all three put on our hats and cloaks, and take you back to your mother," she said, with the thought in her mind, perhaps, that Paul would be glad of the children's absence while he did his part of the tree-dressing. "Suze and Paulette will leave you the kitten to play with, and you won't mind being alone here again for a few minutes, while we get ready!"

Even if Angel had minded, now that a blue veil of twilight was dropping over the garden, she would have said "No," bravely, to wipe off ever so little, if she could, of the stain of eavesdropping. But suddenly, when the children's mother asked that question, and she realized that she would have the place to herself, the most wonderful idea came into her head, straight and direct as a bee flies into an open flower. She happened at the moment to be putting on her mittens preparatory to a start, when a glint of her mother's diamond flashed up from her plump little thumb to her eyes. The flash was an inspiration. When the children and their mother were out of the way she would pull off her hair-ribbon and tie the ring to the kitten's neck. Then, when they had taken her home and come back, Suze and Paulette would find the ring and think it the magic gift of a fairy, because (they would say to each other) no ordinary little girl could have a gorgeous diamond like that to give away.

Oh, it was a splendid idea! Angel was sure her mother would approve when she had thoroughly explained, for mother was rich. Angel had often heard servants at home and in hotels, away over across the sea in America, telling one another that Mrs. Odell's father was Cyrus P. Holroyd, one of the big millionaires. Mother herself had heaps and heaps of money, too much to please father; and grandpa—that very Cyrus P. Holroyd—was always sending presents of jewelry and things. He sent beautiful presents to Angel, as well. Probably she would find some from him when she went home, for when you visited at grandpa's house in New York, it was the rule to begin Christmas on Christmas Eve, and have still more things on Christmas morning, too, when you thought you had got all there were.

No sooner had Suze senior and her two children turned their backs than Angel proceeded hurriedly to carry out her idea. The kitten, unused to being personally decorated at Christmas or any other time, resisted the ribbon with some determination. But Angel was even more determined, and, as in war, size counted. Before the trio returned, ready for their walk, the bow had been tied and the victim had dashed angrily away. This vanishing act suited Angel precisely, for the bright blue of the ribbon was conspicuous on the white fur, even in twilight, and to have the fairy's legacy discovered in the fairy's presence would have been premature. In fact, it would have spoiled everything, and Angel encouraged the animal's exit with a suppressed "Scat!"

The first hotel they tried was the right one. Angel knew it by the gate. But it was rather a long walk to get there, and Suze senior—who told Angel that she was "Madame Valois"—shyly refused the little girl's insistent plea to "come in and meet mother."

"I must take the children back to their supper," she explained. "Already it's getting dark, and—it's Christmas Eve, you know. I hope your mother won't have had time to worry. Tell her we brought you home as soon as—as you were found."

A faint fear that some gentle hint of reproach lurked in the kind words (as she had hidden under the palm) stirred in Angel's mind, making her wish all the more to benefit the Valois family, and so justify her eavesdropping. She pictured, with joy, the sensational discovery of the diamond ring, perhaps while the children were receiving their presents from the Christmas tree. She did hope it might happen then! So anxious was she to tell her mother the story of the fairy garden that, after the good-

bys, she bounded into the hotel like a bomb. Her mother's suite was on the first floor, and in her haste to get to it Angel would have dashed past a group in the hall, had not the *concierge* headed her off.

"Here she is, Mademoiselle! Now everything is all right!" he exclaimed, as joyously as though great news had come from the front. And out from the group tottered Mademoiselle Rose, to precipitate herself upon the child and drench her velvet hood with a waterspout of tears.

Angel had not been left in ignorance by her relatives that she was a young person of some charm and importance, but never in her life had she been so overwhelmed with adjectives, in any language. Mademoiselle Rose, shedding tears which looked to Angel's astonished gaze the size of pebbles, called her a lamb, a saint, an adored cherub, and many other things which Angel determined to bring up in future if ever she were scolded. It appeared that the distracted governess, on waking from her dream of love with Claude, had nearly fainted on finding Angel gone. She had left her soldier on his crutches, to rush here and there, searching wildly for her charge. She had described the child to every one she met, and asked in vain for news of her. She had dashed into shops and houses, she had been led to the *gendarmerie* and had sobbed out her story of loss, reluctantly pausing to see details industriously written down; and at last she had run all the way to the hotel, hoping against hope that the lost one had returned.

Her state of mind, as described by herself, was tragic when she had ransacked the rooms and asked questions of servants and visitors, only to be assured that her charge had not come home. She blamed herself entirely, not Angel in the least; therefore Angel felt kindly toward Mademoiselle, and attempted to comfort her by saying how glad she ought to be, anyhow, that Claude was alive. The young Frenchwoman hysterically admitted this, and was in the act of expressing also her thankfulness that Madame had not yet returned, to suffer, when Madame herself walked in, followed by a *commissionnaire* bearing many bundles. She looked rosy and girlish, but at sight of Mademoiselle on her knees in the hall, bathing Angel with tears, her bright color ebbed.

"What has happened?" she stammered, her big, dark eyes appealing to *concierge*, governess, and all Angel's other satellites.

It was the child who answered, before any one else could speak. "Oh, mother!" she gasped, drawing in a long breath, "I haven't been runned over by a mowing-car, or bited by a mad dog, or drownded in the sea, or anything bad, but only just lost for a very little while; and it was lovely, in a fairy garden. And I want to tell you about it *quick*, because I gave them your ring what has one big di'mond and little ones all the way 'round, tied to their white kitten's neck."

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Elinor Odell, as Angel paused at the end of that long-drawn breath. "What does she mean, Mademoiselle?"

"I do not know yet, Madame," the governess apologized, getting to her feet and wiping her eyes with the drier of two damp handkerchiefs. "The blessed one has but just come in, when I was about to go out once more and search. There has been no time to hear, but, praise, le bon Dieu, she is at least safe and unhurt."

"I will telephone the good news to the *gendarmerie*," murmured the *concierge*.

Elinor Odell adored her child, not knowing for certain which she loved better than the other, if either—Dick, her husband, or his daughter and hers. She was warm-hearted, and deep-hearted, too; but circumstances had very early in her life of twenty-eight years developed the practical side of her nature. She had learned how to control herself and to control others. Also she was quick—perhaps too quick—in forming conclusions. Had she not grown up as the only child of a widowed millionaire, she might have been just the beautiful, intelligent, emotional girl she looked, and nothing more; but to her father she owed much besides money and position; she owed many qualities. One of them was a slight surface hardness, like a cooling crust over boiling lava. She realized instantly that, no matter what the "Angel-Imp's" adventure had been, there was no longer any need to worry about the child. She took in that fact, and even as she mentally gave thanks for it she took in something else also. Persons in a garden whither Angel had strayed or been invited had apparently persuaded the innocent and impulsive little girl to give away a valuable diamond ring. Prejudice instantly built up within Elinor a barrier against some one unknown. She didn't mean to reproach Angel, but she did mean to catechize her, and she intended to get back her father's last year's Christmas present.

"All's well that ends well," she quoted, with the radiant smile which had helped to give Elinor Holroyd the reputation of a beauty. "Come, Angel, come Mademoiselle, let's go up to our own rooms and tell one another everything." Then, when the governess and child had been started off in advance, she paused for whispered instructions concerning the bundles. They contained the Christmas presents which she had gone out to buy for Angel, but, luckily, the little girl was too excited to notice and wonder inconveniently. She wasn't even thinking of the gifts from her grandfather in America, which she confidently expected.

"Now, my Angel-Imp, tell me all about it," began Elinor, when the lights were switched on in the sitting-room. "Or will you wait until we've taken off your hat and coat?"

But the child was not in the mood to wait for an earthquake. She began pouring forth her story, aided and supplemented, at first, by Mademoiselle, who found it necessary to explain Claude. After alternately blaming and defending her absent-mindedness, however, the word passed from Rose to Angel, who was quick to seize the advantage. She alone knew the whole story, so she alone could tell how she had wanted to go home; how she hadn't liked to bother Mademoiselle; how she had got lost, and how, just then, she had found herself at the gate of the "fairy garden."

"I truly almost b'lieved it was," she announced, earnestly, "because you said, 'who knows if there aren't fairies?' So they must have gardens. Anyhow, the children are as pretty as fairies, but I don't think they can be as happy, because their mother cried, and their father's been wounded, and cheated, too, by a horrid man who's going to take everything away from them, even the

garden, and the oranges—the last things they've got to eat. And they're *dreadfully* poor—oh, as poor as poor! That's what their mother was crying about when she left the children in the house so they wouldn't know. And when their father came home and found her putting flowers to bed and crying on them, she cried more because he was carrying such a heavy Christmas tree and had hurt his foot getting it, and he was so pale and thin, she *couldn't* stop when he asked her. Besides, she'd had *such* bad news in a letter while he was gone! It was about the nasty man who took all their money and was going to take back the garden, too. That was why I was sure you'd want me to give them your di'mond ring that you hardly ever wear. It's always lying around somewhere, mother, so when I found it on my thumb—you see, I forgot to put it back on your table—I thought it would be *just* the thing, and a lovely surprise for the children when they found it tied to the cat's neck with my hair-ribbon. I 'spect they must be finding it now, because they brought me here—they and their mother, while their father was putting the dec'rations on the Christmas tree—and by this time maybe they're home. Their name's Valois—Suzanne and Paulette Valois, and their mother's Suzanne, too, or Susan, because *she's* English and they're Belgian. And don't you think if grandpa sent me any presents I can give some to them? There's a whole pile of letters on the table. Maybe there's one from grandpa to say—"

"Stop—stop!" cried Elinor, catching the child before she could spring on the latest arrivals from the post. "It seems to me that you've been in rather too much of a hurry already, with your Christmas presents to the Valois family, though I know you meant for the best, darling. Now, the next thing to do is to explain how Father and Mother Valois happened to talk so much about their troubles before a stranger they'd never seen before—"

"Oh, they didn't see me then. I thought I telled you that!" broke in the child. "I eavesdropped, under a tree with branches most to the ground. I went in to play with the *fluffiest* white kitten, and it was while I was there they talked."

"How do you know they didn't see you?" inquired Elinor, judicially.

"Because if they had they wouldn't have talked, with me listening," Angel carefully made clear to the slow comprehension of a grown-up.

"I'm not so sure," murmured the grownup. She did not speak the words aloud, because she wished her Angel-Imp to go on believing, as long as she might, that human nature was all good. It occurred to her that a tree must have abnormally thick branches, if a child in a pearl-gray velvet hood and coat trimmed with glistening chinchilla were to remain invisible throughout a long and intimate conversation. It occurred to her, also, that the velvet and chinchilla simply shouted "Money!" People were extraordinarily subtle, sometimes, when they had an object to gain, as she had learned in her girlhood through sad experience. She, too, had had faith in everybody when she was Angel's age, and even years older, but her father had thought it best that for self-protection she should be enlightened early. She did not quite believe in Angel's fairies of the fairy garden. The story, even as the child told it, had discrepancies.

"I fancy, darling," Elinor suggested, "that your new friends can't be so dreadfully poor as they made you think. You see, if they were, they'd have no money to spend on a Christmas tree—"

"It was growing on a mountain," Angel defended her friends.

"Perhaps, but it wasn't growing all ready decorated. You said that the father—what's his name—Valois?—stayed at home to decorate the tree while the rest of the family brought you home—and told you all about themselves, their name and everything, I suppose, so you might know where to find them again and take me to see them, perhaps. It was good of them to bring you, of course, and I'm grateful. I should have cried, like Madame Valois, if I'd come back while you were lost. But, all the same, dear—"

She stopped short, because she did not wish the child—so young, so sweet, so warmhearted—to be disillusioned. The thought in her mind, however, was that Monsieur Valois and his English wife might not have been so eager to tell their name had they learned in time about the diamond ring. They might not have made it so easy to find them in their fairy garden as it was now! But even though their name was known, it would be difficult to get back the ring, unless she—Elinor Odell—chose to take strenuous measures. It would be so simple for these people to say, when inquiries were made about the ring, and a sum of money offered in its place, that they had never seen it; that some one outside must have noticed the glittering thing tied to the cat's neck, and stolen it. That, she thought, was almost certain to be the excuse they would make; and her heart, which could be warm and generous as Angel's, hardened toward the people of the garden.

"I suppose, unless I want a horrid fuss, I shall have to give up the ring for lost, or else offer nearly the full value as a bribe," she said to herself.

Nevertheless, she rang, and bade a waiter ask the manager of the hotel to step to her sitting-room for a moment. Meanwhile, until he should come, she glanced at the letters. There were many, and among them was one addressed to "Miss Angel Odell. To be opened by herself," in Cyrus Holroyd's handwriting. But before it could be passed to its owner a knock announced the manager of the hotel.

He was delighted to hear that the missing little one was safe, and listened politely to Mrs. Odell's questions concerning the Valois family. At first the name suggested nothing, but when he learned that the man was "a gardener, or horticulturist, or something," he remembered. Ah yes, to be sure! There was such a person, a Belgian refugee, but with money, it would appear, for he had bought property from a Swiss who had lived for some years in Mentone. Not a property of great value, no. And it was said that the Swiss— Siegel his name was—had let his business decline. After selling it he had gone away at once. No one knew much about Valois except that he had an English Wife, a good-looking young woman, who had visited all the hotels earlier in the season, trying to get work as a teacher of her own language, or as a seamstress. That would look as if

Valois had found the business profit disappointing. But then, there was nothing for any one in these days. The only thing to do was to hold on.

Yes, the only thing to do was to hold on. But it took money to hold on. Mrs. Odell was ready to admit that the Valois family might be unfortunate, yet she was all the more sure she would never see her diamond ring again. Neither would she see the Valoises, husband or wife, unless she went, or sent—

"A young man who wishes to speak for a moment with Madame," announced a waiter at the door, and presented a bit of pasteboard. It was a business card, on which was printed—not engraved—in large, plain letters, "Paul Valois, Horticulturist."

So, after all, he had come! But, no doubt, only to try and get money.

"Mademoiselle, will you go with Angel to her room and take off her hat and coat?" Elinor hastily cleared the field for action.⁴⁴

"Oh, here's a letter from her grandfather, in New York. You may read it to her. And presently I will call her in to tell me what he says."

The tall French girl whisked away the small American child. The door was shut between the two rooms, and at the outer one, leading into the corridor, a tap sounded.

"Come in!" cried Elinor, clothing herself with dignity. But it was not Paul Valois, horticulturist, who entered. It was Mrs. Odell's own Irish-American maid, with an immense parcel.

"It comes from Paris, and it's for little Miss Angel," she said, leaving the door open. "Oh, Madame, it's sure to be that wonderful doll we talked of."

Then, just in time to catch these words—appropriate words for Christmas Eve—a tall, thin young man appeared on the threshold. His hat was in his hand, and the scar of a wound still showed red on his forehead. Though the night was cold, and Elinor Odell had been glad of her sables, he wore no overcoat. His clothes looked more suitable for summer than for winter, even in the south of France, and she wondered if it were a trick to catch her sympathy. She could not help thinking that he had a good, brave face, not the face of a trickster; but she deliberately put herself in the judgment seat. It would take more than a pair of fine eyes and a broad forehead with a soldier's scar, to charm her out of it!

"Good evening," she greeted him pleasantly, in French. "It was you, I think, who kindly sent your wife here with my little lost girl this evening. I'm glad to be able to thank you both for what you did." Designedly she let the man have a "lead," and waited curiously to see what use he would make of it.

He did not keep her long in suspense. "Oh, Madame, we did nothing at all," he replied, giving his case away unexpectedly. "My children thought your little girl must be a fairy. You see, my wife tells them wonderful stories. She comes from a county in England where they still believe in the 'wee folk'—Devonshire. Perhaps you've been there? It was a great joy to them to have the visit, and the walk was a pleasure. We are all glad if you have been spared anxiety; but I fear you must have been anxious about another loss. It is for that reason I have hurried here, on a bicycle borrowed from our nearest neighbor. The little lady amused herself tying a ribbon and a beautiful ring to the neck of my children's pet, a white kitten given by that same neighbor who lent the bicycle. Then she must have forgotten to take it off. It was only a few minutes ago that my Paulette found the ring, when she came home. I have brought it to you."

"How good of you to take so much trouble!" exclaimed Elinor. But something inside her whispered, "He thought it would be safer to claim the regard than to keep the diamond."

The Belgian took from his pocket a clean handkerchief with a knot tied in the corner, and from the knot produced the ring.

"La voilà, Madame," he said, simply, as he laid the shining thing on the letter-strewn table. "And now I will not disturb you longer. Permit me to wish for you and the little fairy who visited us a happy Christmas."⁴⁷

So he was leaving the reward to her generosity! Wasn't that rather clever of him?

"Thank you for the wishes as well as for bringing back my ring," said Elinor. "And—you must, of course, allow me to recompense your kindness. A souvenir of it, and of my daughter, for your children's Christmas—"

As she spoke, she took from her gold-chain bag a fat bundle of notes and quickly selected one for five hundred francs. The ring was worth this sum many times over, but it seemed to her that a hundred dollars was not an ungenerous present. If the man were really poor—and honest—he ought to be well satisfied. She watched his face as, with a smile, she held out the French note.

He flushed so deeply that the scar on his forehead turned purple.

"It isn't as much as he expected!" thought Elinor. She waited, however, for him to speak.⁴⁸

"Oh, Madame, I thank you!" he stammered. "But I could not possibly accept a reward. I am only too glad to have found the ring."

He seemed actually to be going, to be hurrying away in order to escape persuasion; yet Elinor, in her experience, realized that the move might be meant only to draw her on. She was almost sure that the man would pause at the door, but rather than see him thus humiliated (because she couldn't help liking his face) she persisted. "You surely must take the money, or I shall be hurt."

The face, which she liked, grew a shade redder, and then became suddenly paler than before. "Please do not say that, Madame," he pleaded, "because it would be—it would be a thing I *could* not do, to take money for returning to a lady her lost

property. It would make me worse than a beggar."

A little, tingling thrill shot through Elinor's veins. She felt ashamed, for this outburst was genuine. Not even a cynic could mistake it, and she hated herself because she was a cynic. Still, she would not give up her point—less than ever would she give it up; for now she began earnestly to want the man to have her money.

"You shouldn't feel like that," she argued. "You didn't ask me for anything. I give of my own free will. You see, I wish to be even with you. You've done me a kindness. Let me repay it."

It seemed to her that Paul Valois looked at her almost pityingly. "Madame," he said, "will you not grant a man the happiness of giving, not of selling, the one thing in his power, on the eve of Christmas? It has made me happy that through us, in a way, you have been saved from pain at this time when the world should be glad. To pay me for that joy would kill it."

Elinor blushed. "But—but—my little girl tells me—" She stumbled on, awkwardly, and abashed by her awkwardness. "I think by accident she overheard that—that—you had some trouble. Do you think you're right to refuse? Wouldn't your wife feel—"

"She would feel as I do. I can always be sure of her." Paul Valois lifted his head with a radiant look; and Elinor Odell, gazing at him, fascinated, suddenly realized something Christ-like in his type. With that light in his eyes he might have stood as a model to an artist for a portrait of Christ. Elinor wondered how she had dared to offer such a man money. She felt humble before him, and asked herself how, since he would accept no payment, she could atone for the mean way in which she had misjudged him.

"We didn't know that the fairy heard what we said to each other," he went on. "My children call the palm under which she sat their 'summer-house,' because the long fronds fall down and touch the ground. It is like a green tent. But I am sorry if she felt sad for us. Tell her she must not be sad. We have each other, and that is everything. Some way will open. Meanwhile, it is Christmas! Now, Madame, you understand, I have left my children's tree unfinished. I must make haste. Adieu. Bonne Nolë."

Before she could speak again, he was gone.

Five hundred francs! How mean the notes looked, how paltry seemed the spirit in which she had offered it, grudging and judging, and thinking herself generous!

Springing up on the impulse, she flung open the door between the sitting-room and Angela's bedroom. "Your man from the fairy garden has been here," she said in a strained, nervous way. "He has brought back the ring you tied to the kitten's neck."

"Oh, isn't that too bad!" exclaimed Angel, looking up from her grandfather's letter, which she had held in her own hands for Mademoiselle to read aloud. "Didn't you beg him please to keep it for the children?"

"No, I didn't do that, but—" she hesitated—"I tried to make him take some money instead."

Angel opened her eyes very wide. "I s'pose he wouldn't take it, Mummy."

"Why do you 's'pose' that?" Elinor wanted to know.

"O-oh—just because. He isn't—he isn't *that* kind of a man. Don't you remember, Mummy, you say that often to me, when I ask you in the street to give money to some one who looks poor?"

Elinor hung her head like a child. Angel knew more about character by instinct, it seemed, than she had learned through her years of experience! But then, it occurred to her, perhaps, after all, she had not gone about learning her lessons in the right way. Maybe it was just as wise, if not wiser, to believe people *might* be good until you found out that they were bad, instead of beginning the other way around!

"What would you have done in my place?" she asked Angel.

The child was silent for a moment. "If he wouldn't keep the ring, why, I s'pose I should have thought and thought of some other way to make him and big Suze and little Suze and Paulette—and the kitten—all happy for Christmas!" she exclaimed, on an inspiration. "Oh, mother, we *must* do something. I shall have a horrid Christmas if we can't. And that would be a shame because grandpa's sent me a—a—what did you call it, Mademoiselle?"

"A check," said Rose, starting out of a brown study about *her* Christmas, and how she was to spend a part of it with Claude.

"Yes, a big check. Mummy, how much money did you want to give the children's father?"

"A hundred dollars," Elinor replied.

"Is that much?"

"It must have seemed so to him."

"Well, it doesn't to me. Grandpa's sent me five hundred to buy myself just what I like, to make my Christmas happy."

"And what would you like?" asked Elinor, thinking that the child's mind had slid away from the Valois family.

"I'd like to make the people in the fairy garden happy."

"But, a check's the same as money," her mother explained. "You just said yourself he isn't the kind of man—"

"Oh, but I wouldn't give *him* the check," Angel cut in, importantly. "I—I'd lend it to him. No, I mean I'd lend him all he'd paid the nasty man who really owned the garden. And then I'd buy the garden from the nasty man myself if I had enough left, or if I hadn't I'd ask you to. And when the garden was ours, the children's father could have it *rented* to him, couldn't he? Wouldn't that be a good idea?"

"A splendid idea," said Elinor, "But what do you know about rents and such things?"

"I heard grown-up Suze talk about them to Paul," explained Angel, calmly.

"What a head she has! Is it not so, Madame!" cried Rose, working up to the favor she meant to beg for to-morrow.

"Grandpa is always saying I have a great business head," Angel remarked, with extreme self-satisfaction. "And, Mummy, if you think it's a splendid idea, can't we go out now and 'range it all with Paul and Suze? I should love to. It's the *only* thing I'd like to make my Christmas happy with grandpa's money. If we went in a carriage and made the horses run fast maybe we could see the Christmas tree."

Again the small, hard voice whispered in Elinor's ear. "Yes, you could see the Christmas tree, which Paul Valois is rich enough to decorate. Then you will know for *certain* if he rings true." 55

She did already know "for certain"; the best side of her reminded the other side. But Angel was clamoring, spoiled-child fashion, for her to say "yes," so she said it. Conscience and inclination and the child's pleading forced it from her, and the rest followed like a whirlwind. Angel seized her lately discarded hat and coat. Mademoiselle rang for a servant to call a cab. Elinor hurried off to get ready. And in less than ten minutes they were on their way to the fairy garden, without having so much as opened father's present from Paris.

Many months, perhaps even years, had passed since carriage-wheels rolled over the grass-grown road that led in from the big, rusty iron gates. Horses' hoofs under their windows made so strange a sound in the ears of the Valois family that they stopped singing the beautiful hymn of Noel they had begun round the Christmas tree. They stood still, listening in great surprise; and though the room was lit only by one kitchen lamp and a tallow candle (not counting the lights on the tree) Elinor Odell in the act of descending from her cab could see through an uncurtained window the man, the woman, and their two children, hand in hand, making a ring round the dark-green pyramid of pine-branches.

She and Angel had come alone. Mademoiselle Rose was staying at home to write Claude that Madame Odell had given her Christmas free—the charming, kind lady! Now "the charming, kind lady" and her little girl knocked almost timidly at the front door of the red-roofed white cottage—a queer, low-browed cottage built for peasants, in the old days when Mentone belonged to the Prince of Monaco. In a minute the door opened. Paul had answered the knock, carrying the lamp, and, lighted in that theatrical way from below, his face looked more than ever like the face in a picture. Happiness had been washed from it by the pallor of dismay for an instant, Suze having suggested the advent of Siegel; but even in the midst of his amazement he smiled a welcome for Elinor and Angel.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Madame," he said, with the graciousness of a banished prince. "Yet it is a real pleasure. Have you brought the fairy to see our Christmas tree?"

"Yes," answered Elinor. "She wanted to come. And—to propose a plan. It's all hers. May we really see the Christmas tree?"

"Indeed we shall be glad," said Paul, and, making no excuses for the poorness of his show, he ushered the beautifully dressed woman and her child into the room.

It was a small, plain room, with white-washed walls and little furniture; but he or his wife had made it charming with trails of ivy and wreaths of mistletoe and holly. The kitchen lamp had a shade of red chiffon fashioned from some old hat trimming of Susan's. The tree (center of the picture for which all else was a frame) stood bravely up in a green-painted tub packed with earth. Over the brown sandy surface Paul had laid velvety bits of moss and ferns from the mountainside. Odds and ends of tallow candle saved from time to time had their ugliness hidden in orange-red globes of mandarins, cleverly emptied of their pulp, and hung from the branches by handles of thin wire. Through the semi-transparent skins the light filtered with a soft, warm glow. Susan had threaded red berries and scarlet geraniums from the garden into long chains, which Paul had looped intricately over the tree. He had collected silver paper from tobacco-smoking friends, and cut out stars and crescents to sprinkle here and there. Tufts of cotton stolen from an old quilt gave an effect of scattered snowflakes, and a quantity of powdered isinglass which had once formed a stove window glittered on the green pine-needles like diamonds. As for presents, Santa Claus seemed to have thought that with so beautiful a tree they would scarcely be needed. He had provided two dolls, brightly painted and cut out of cardboard. They were dressed in accordion-pleated, pink tissue-paper and had hats to match. One hung on the right side of the tree, and one on the left, and midway between each a gingerbread elephant was suspended.

There were the "decorations" which Elinor had sagely told herself no poor man could afford.

"Oh, mother!" gasped Angel, "did you ever, ever see such a *lov-elly* Christmas tree in all your life?"

Elinor's eyes saw the mandarin lanterns shine through tears. "Never one so sweet," she said. And sensitive Susan Valois knew that she was not "making fun."

The woman of experience found herself stammering like a school-girl as she tried to explain Angel's plan without hurting the dear creatures' feelings. But the child, with no such fear in her heart, made it quite clear, without embarrassment. "You see," she said, "the fairy garden will belong to all of us together. And I shall be like a grown-up person because you will have to pay me the rent, the way people do to grandpa's agent, such a *nice* man with a bald head and a wart on his nose. Perhaps if you take care of the garden well, and plant lots of flowers, we shall all get rich from it like grandpa is. You *will* say yes, won't you? And it'll be the very happiest night of my life."

"Of mine, too," vowed Elinor, and meant it. So what could Paul and Suze do but say "yes," and add that it was the happiest night of their lives also.

"Then it's settled, isn't it, mother?" breathed Angel. "Is that all, or have I forgotten anything?"

Elinor bent over her, on a sudden impulse. "Father has sent you a wonderful doll from Paris, dear," she whispered. "I haven't opened the box, but I know what's in it, for a letter came in the post: a doll that talks and walks and has real hair and eyelashes. So, would you like to spare a family of dolls I bought for you before I had the letter? Would you like to spare them to these little girls?"

"I know what I forgot!" exclaimed Angel. "I forgot to tell Paulette and Suze that Santa Clause left something with me for them. I 'spect he hadn't time to come back himself. He has so much to do for all the children 'most everywhere in the world, whose fathers are in the war. I shouldn't wonder if what he left is dolls—lots of dolls. Maybe quite big dolls."

Paulette rushed to her mother and whispered, as Angel's mother had whispered.

"She says, now she *knows* your little girl is a fairy," Susan explained aloud.

"I think," said Elinor, "this house is full of fairies to-night. And they've brought me a better Christmas present than was ever brought by Santa Claus—a present of something I lost a long time ago: a warm spot that had fallen out of my heart."

THE END

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